A Comparison of Buddhist and Daoist Understandings of Body-and-Mind

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted
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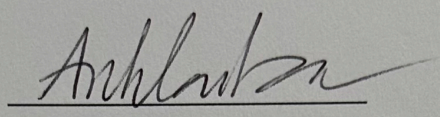

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Abstract

Though founded more than twenty-five centuries ago, Buddhist and Daoist theories and practices are still sufficient in promoting and maintaining physical and mental health for modern people. While Buddhist philosophy is to liberate oneself from endless cycle of rebirths, it still provides practical teachings and methods for the training to body-and-mind for less sufferings and more joy in daily life. Another treasure of the East-Daoist philosophy- emphasizes in harmony with the cosmos and self-cultivation of vitality energy for a healthy life as long as possible. Both of these practices recognize the energetic body of human, through which we can train for the higher cultivation level, the mind and the spirit. By using the physical body, one can follow one of these practices to activate the energetic body for a healthier body and mind. Buddhist practices include chanting, breathing exercises, meditating of different traditions, from the Four Foundations of Mindfulness of Theravada school, Zen meditation of Mahayana school, to Bodhidharma Yijin Jing style of Shaolin qigong, to Mahamudra meditation of Tantric school, and the Tibetan Nine-round Breathing-a simple exercise for clearing energy channels on daily basis. Daoist practices such as qigong, taijiquan, and *neidan* cultivation provide methods for health enhancement from physical and mental aspects all the way to merging with the Dao, a state of spiritual enlightenment. These practices are proven to increase neuro-functions that can be measured and studied in neuroscience field.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Overview and motivation for this paper:

Buddhists and those who explore the Buddha's teachings often think of the practice and the path is for liberating oneself from sufferings especially mentally and psychologically, and ultimately reaching Nirvana. They hardly think of Buddhist practice as improving physical health and even reversing some illnesses. Such benefits often are thought as the role of Taichi from Chinese Daoist root, and Yoga from ancient Indian culture. The purpose of this paper is to explore and compare how Buddhism and Daoism understand human body and mind as well as how each religion has theory and practices for improvement of both physical and mental health. The significance of this work might be to contribute one more arena for illness prevention and health enhancement in daily life. This means to reduce sufferings and to increase happiness in the mundane world, which sadly often be measured in money value. From this nature, let us peek into the costs of illness and sufferings in term of money value.

Modern society has been relying heavily in pharmaceutical supplies to respond to illness. In 2023, overall pharmaceutical expenditures in the US had a total of $722.5 billion, grew 13.6% compared to 2022. This increase was broken down as: utilization (a 6.5% increase), new drugs (a 4.2% increase) and price (a 2.9% increase) (Tichy et al., 2024). According to another report, the U.S. complementary and alternative medicine market size was estimated at USD 28.65 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach around USD 229.12 billion by 2033 (NCCIH, 2025). This signals how much people rely on medicine and supplements in dealing with illness and health maintenance.

At the same time, people in US society have been adapting more spiritual and religious teachings into their daily life practice. In 2010, estimated U.S. Buddhist practitioners at 3.5

million people-approximately one percent of the population, of whom 40% are living in Southern California (Wikipedia, 2025). With this one percent of the population learning and practicing the Buddha's teachings, how much can that group contribute to the health maintaining effort to keep the cost of healthcare lower?

Beside Buddha's teachings, there are Daoist teachings that can widely be practicing in health preservation and cultivation known as Taiji and qigong exercises. It is estimated there are around 30,000 Daoist practitioners living in the United States, though many more of Americans may take an aspect of Daoism and incorporate it into their own spiritual practice. These practitioners of Daoist healing may belong to or identify with a different religious tradition and often do not consider themselves as Daoist members, even as they seek to enjoy the benefits of Taiji and qigong (Wikipedia, 2025).

In the conventional view and operation of the modern society, we view the body is one entity that has physical and mental aspects of which the medical knowledge and application focus on in their research and development. In this conventional view, mental aspect of human existence is associated with functions of the brain of which its nerve conducts and chemicals have been studied upon. The third aspect of human, the soul, belongs to the arena of religious operation. In the past few decades, we are more exposed to the ancient traditions which view human in a more holistic view. Buddhism and Daoism carry one common characteristic which is to view human though dividing into three parts as physical body, energetic body, and the mind aspects. Moreover, both religions have methods to utilize the physical body for cultivating the energetic body and uniting with the mind-the spiritual state of human existence. In return, the healthy spiritual state can enhance the physical body, through energetic regulation.

As a clinician, I've seen people with illnesses not only affecting their physical bodies, but also their psychological health. Some can be healed or controlled by medical interventions, some cannot. The current standard medical treatment across our society relies on scientific proofs of disease control through biomedical model of tests and researches. However, from the traditional medical knowledge and experience, there are more means to restore health and reverse illness beyond the biomedical method. As a Buddhist and Oriental medical practitioner, I wish to explore how Buddha's teachings and the Daoist teachings can provide understanding and applications for promoting health and minimizing suffering from illness in our daily life, both at home and at clinic.

I.2. Research questions

If we understand human existence based on biochemical model, our methods to keep human healthy and to fix the illnesses are to be limited in the world of biochemical field. If we can expand our understand to a broader range of reality or multi-dimensions, there are more ways to maintain health and to heal illness. There are three research questions which serve as the aiming for this paper. First, how and what Buddhism and Daoism view human body and mind. Second, what and how practices in each of the two would benefit human body and mind. And third, how those practices are understood in the modern science world.

In the wider context, this purpose also touches upon how can human mind reverses the physically ill body back to healthy state of being? If so, how in Buddhism? And how in Daoism? For the future study, in the fields of Buddhist practice and Neuroscience: how the mind and the brain interact.

I. 3. Objectives:

Modern science has been exploring this treasure from the East with neuroscience research for figuring out how mental health might be able to affect the physical health for those undeniable phenomena of such transformative methods. To sample such exploration, this paper introduces and analyzes understandings and methods of cultivation for better health from the two gem stones of the ancient civilizations from the East: Buddhist and Daoist practices.

Daoism offers the world concept of Yin and Yang as the dynamic balance in both nature and in human body. Health to people of the Eastern cultures means the perfect balance of yin and yang. There is indefinitely dividing of yin and yang in human existence, according to this theory. If the body is yin, the mind is yang. In daily life, resting the body is yin, working or moving around is yang. Within the body, the front is yin, the back is yang; from waist down is yin, from waist up is yang, etc. This paper introduces to its readers some aspects of the Daoist Yin-Yang theory and its applications in how to improve one's body and mind in daily life. In the sense of a religion, Daoism offers to serious practitioners the teachings on training oneself all the way to uniting with the Dao. To lay people, this tradition offers Taichi exercise for physical and mental health.

However, Buddhist teachings for improving health or reverse illness have not been known much to the public beyond meditation for calming the mind such as in anger management cases. To the general public, meditation just means following the breath to prevent negative thoughts affecting the physical conditions such as blood pressure or weak lungs. In this sense, there is no difference between Buddhist and Daoist methods. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to explore Buddhist wisdom in terms of theory and practice that can contribute to the society for modern people to stay healthy and happy at the least cost possible.

I. 4. Scope of Research:

This paper focuses on the theories and practices which benefit body and mind from both traditions. Theories and practice instructions can be found in Buddhist texts, Daoist texts and writings from scholars and practitioners of the fields on their understandings and practices in reality. Besides, there are neuroscience understandings on the effects of the practices in these two traditions on human neuro system as well as in general physical and mental health.

Since this has to do with practice, YouTube clips from real and well-known Buddhist and Daoist practitioners are also good sources for dynamic and vivid demonstrations and instructions for health improvement and illness prevention. This particular source is more supportive and illustrative for those who already read or learn directly from the practitioners in real time.

I.5. Methodology:

The methodology in composing this paper is the literary analysis of Buddhist texts and Daoist texts. Buddhist texts include translation from Pali sacred text, Samyutta Nikaya, books written or translated by Buddhist scholars and the monastic masters in all three main Buddhist branches: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Daoist texts include books from modern scholars and practitioners on Daoist philosophy and exercises. Some of these texts are written by Daoist and Taijiquan and Qigong practitioners in the recent century. There are also Daoist and Yogic body maps and the related exercise methods.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1 Buddhist readings:

Since its birth at twenty-six centuries ago, Buddhism has permeated into various cultures and societies in each country it arrived. The medicine aspect of these countries and societies have inherited and applied the Buddha's teachings for maintaining good health and treating

illnesses. There have been many Buddhist scholars and practitioners dedicating their whole lives to learn, research, practice, and document down their collections of Buddhist knowledge and practices for human health benefits.

II.1.1. *An Anthology of 50 Discourses from the Samyutta Nikaya*

The book is an edited work from Bhikkhu Sujato's translation of *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN) from Pali to English (Dhammabodhi, 2023). This Nikaya is considered one of the oldest sutras in the transmission history of Buddha's Teachings in the conventional world of scholars and researchers. Rev. Dhammabodhi has organize the collections in the way that the readers can see the pedagogy of the Buddha's forty-five years teaching. Among these sections, there are particular 3 sections that present Buddhist view on human existence, in both physical and mental conditions. The details are to be discussed in the finding section. Within this anthology, there is the discourse SN 54.1-Mindfulness of Breathing in which the Buddha gave instruction of how to do the sixteen exercises of using breaths to cultivate the calm and clear mind, an early step of the spiritual path to enlightenment.

II.1.2. *In the Buddha's words*

From the book *In the Buddha's Words*: *An anthology of discourses from the Pali Canon,* under part IX of the book- Shining the Light of Wisdom, the editor summarizes the Buddha's teachings from the angle of an enlightened being looking back to the mundane life (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005, p. 301-369). In Samyutta Nikaya-chapter 22, the Buddha taught that human existence as a combination of the Five Aggregates. Those five are: 1) form or body, 2) feelings or sensation, 3) perception, 4) motive force for thinking-speech-action, and 5) consciousness. Most of our sufferings come from perception and motive force-or will- to create karma through thinking-speech-action; the technical word for this is "volitional formation". Just like the

Buddha's simile of the painful darts: first is the physical dart hurting us; second is the mental dart hurting us again which multiplies many times if we do not carefully navigate our thoughts toward the suffering-free path. What path is that? It is the Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

In Theravada tradition, there is the listing of sixteen exercises from *Ānāpānasati Sutta (Mindfulness of Breathing),* discourse 118 in Majjhima Nikaya. The sutta includes sixteen steps of practice, and groups them into four tetrads, associating them with the four placings of mindfulness-*satipatthanas*. This sutta contains the most detailed meditation instructions in the Pali Canon.

II.1.3. ***A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine***

In this book, the author explores the intersection of Buddhist practices and medical traditions across time and geography, offering a comprehensive analysis of how Buddhism has influenced and been influenced by medical knowledge throughout history. There are journals and discussion on the historical, cultural, and doctrinal connections between Buddhism and medicine, showing how Buddhist texts and practices have integrated medical thought, healing, and the body into their spiritual framework. There are three main traditions of Buddhist Medicine: Nikaya, Mahayana, and Tantric Buddhism (Salguero, 2022).

Nikaya tradition: the first century BCE in Sri Lanka, written Pali text thought to hold the original teachings from the Buddha. In these early texts, medicine was a recurring theme. The vinayas, monastic disciplinary codes (1st-4th centuries CE): the practice of healing is a "worldly art", meaning "mundane" world. Not only in the vinayas, but also in early Buddhist scriptures,

medical concepts and anatomy and physiological terminology can be found. The physical body is described as combination of the Four Great Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind (p.17-32).

Mahayana tradition: There are healing rituals with chanting of Medicine Buddha Sutra, the Great Compassion Mantra, and sections of the Lotus Sutra associated with healing powers. Buddhist monks and nuns can host these rituals with offering altars and chanting in praying for either sick individuals or unrestful spirits for fast recovery and less suffering during illness. Though the basic medical theories recorded in Mahayana writing in general are similar to those of Nikaya Buddhism and ancient Indian medicine, there are more healing and new healing rituals added significantly to the practice in managing health and disease. Mahayana medical ethics emphasize on compassion and skillful means as the base for all efforts of healing either physical or mental illnesses (p.18-47).

Vajrayana Buddhism: by middle of the first century CE, Buddhism had been influenced from Indian religious movement known as Tantra. Since then, a new form of practice which involves secret teachings about invisible levels of reality exists, known as Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism. Only in Tibet and the surrounding Himalayas region, Tantric Buddhist tradition adopted the full range of the tantric practices. This tradition concern of the "subtle body" and transformation of healing power through rituals performed by tantric practitioners (tāntrikas). This is where we find Buddhist bodhisattva Tārā and Medicine Buddha (p.48-67).

II.1.4. ***Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources***

The book is the collection of different scholastic Buddhist writings on doctrines and records with topics such as illness, cure and care as describes in Pali Canon. In addition, there are articles on meditation as a method for healing sickness, as well as methods of curing meditation sickness. There is complex relationship between Buddhist practices and the healing

traditions of various Asian cultures. Salguero, a scholar of medical anthropology, delves into the ways in which Buddhist teachings and practices have influenced and been integrated into medical systems throughout history.

At the core of the book, the concept *suffering* (*dukkha*), one of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhist philosophy, is not only emotional and psychological distress but also physical illness and the impermanence of the body. Buddhism views the body and mind as interconnected, with healing being a holistic process that seeks to address both physical ailments and mental suffering. The author emphasizes that Buddhist medicine is not solely concerned with curing disease but also with promoting spiritual well-being, which includes the cultivation of mindfulness, compassion, and ethical living. In countries like China, Japan, Tibet, and Southeast Asia, Buddhist monks played significant roles as medical practitioners, blending traditional medical knowledge with Buddhist teachings. The book details various healing practices that have been developed under the influence of Buddhism, such as meditation, dietary regulations, herbal remedies, and rituals designed to adjust and regain balance of body and mind (Salguero, 2017).

Meditation and *mindfulness* are therapeutic tools in Buddhist medicine, especially in how they help individuals manage stress, reduce pain, and foster mental clarity. The book highlights modern research and clinical applications of these techniques in contemporary Western medicine, where mindfulness-based therapies and meditation practices are increasingly used to treat certain physical and psychological conditions.

In ethical dimensions of Buddhist healing, the practitioner's intention matters in the healing process. The compassionate motivation to relieve suffering is central to both the practice of Buddhist medicine and the practitioner's path toward spiritual enlightenment. Buddhist medicine encourages a deep respect for life and a focus on the interconnectedness of all beings,

leading to a form of healing that goes beyond individual health and contributes to the well-being of the community.

II.1.5. *Being Human in a Buddhist World: History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet*

The book introduces many colored Tibetan medical illustrations at the start. Then, it has three main parts. The first part is about reading paintings in Tibetan medical books and the history of how the high-rank government officials sponsored for the creating and collecting of medical texts and paintings. The Fifth Dalai Lama and the Desi in 17th century CE are the key individuals to emphasize on medicine development. Part two provides contexts of how Tibetan medical system put medical guidance as the words of the Buddha; and there is system of medical channels being supported with evidence of physical anatomy and tantric viewing energetic body. Part three discusses the roots of medical profession, the ethics of being human and doctors in material realm, meaning this mundane world. Throughout the book, in the background of discussion on Tibetan official medical texts and their history of formation and transmission, there are the Buddha's teachings on suffering, impermanence, and the interdependence of all phenomena. Being human, from a Buddhist perspective, is about confronting suffering, understanding the nature of attachment, and cultivating wisdom to overcome ignorance. Weaving along the Tibetan illustrations from medical ancient texts, the author points out Buddhist understanding of the mind and its transformative potential. She explores how practices like meditation, mindfulness, and ethical living enable individuals to navigate the challenges of existence. In this book, the most relevant part for this paper is part two where energetic channels being discussed in details (Gyatso, 2017).

II.1.6. *Secret Map of the Body: Vision of the Human Energy Structure*

This book explores the spiritual and energetic anatomy of the human body from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective. Gyalwa Yangonpa Gyaltsen Palzan (1213-1258) is the enlightened master in spiritual yogic practice and therefore has the ability to map out human energy structure beyond the physical anatomy. At first, there is the concept that the physical body is interconnected with an energetic structure that influences our health, emotions, and spiritual well-being. This energy body is composed of subtle channels, energies, and centers, which form a blueprint that governs our overall vitality. The book is deeply rooted in Tibetan Buddhist cosmology and philosophy, offering a detailed framework for understanding the human body not just as a physical structure but as a dynamic and interconnected energy system. The teachings provide a holistic approach to health and well-being. In summary, *Secret Map of the Body* offers a rich exploration of the human body from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, emphasizing the integration of body, mind, and energy for healing, spiritual development, and overall well-being. Through meditation, energy work, and understanding the subtle anatomy, the text provides tools for individuals seeking to balance their physical, emotional, and spiritual health (Yangonpa, 2021)

II.1.7. *The Body as a Text and the Text as the Body: A View from the Kālacakratantra's Perspective*

The book delves into the intricate relationship between the body and textual representations in the Kālacakra tradition, emphasizing how the body serves as both a literal and metaphorical text within this tantric framework. Wallace's analysis provides valuable insights into the unique conceptualization of the body in Kālacakra Tantra, highlighting its role in spiritual transformation and enlightenment.

The Kālacakra tradition in India views the body as a tantric text composed of mantras and letters, serving as a blueprint for the mind-body complex, its operations, habitual reactions, and potential for transformation. This perspective mirrors contemporary geneticists viewing the body as a genetic text. Similarly, a tantra itself is also interpreted as a metaphor of the body and a representational body of ultimate reality, manifesting in literary form as a reproduction of the Buddha's presence or blessing light. These interpretations highlight the performative function of the tantric text and body. The concept of the body as a sacred text in Indian tantric Buddhism is found in definitions of "tantra" and elaborated in Buddhist tantric discourse (Wallace, 2001).

The Buddhist tantric concept has roots in earlier Buddhist literature, where Dharma is defined as dependent origination and a means to bring about transformation by destroying mental afflictions. In Mahāyāna, mastering a Dharma text is seen as acquiring the good qualities of Buddhahood and even attaining a pure and perfect body. In Indian Buddhist tantric sources, "tantra" is often defined as a "connected discourse" with three interconnected aspects: cause, result, and method. From this perspective, the individual can also be viewed as a tantra with all its facets.

In ordinary understanding, the act of reciting mantras - along with the tantric rituals- creates certain vibration in the air, in the body, and in the mind of the prayer as well as those who stay within such place. Vibration is a form of energy which can directly affect the physical body and its mental status. Therefore, body and mind of the subject can adjust to better balance and ultimately to purification level through the practice. The combination of breathing and the mantra sounds in a specific hand gesture and body posture bring about the healing frequency to this very physical body. Moreover, the practice can facilitate the person to tune in with the frequency of higher power for supports which often known as blessings.

II.1.8. ***Drikung Kagyu Mahamudra Teachings by H. E. Garchen Rinpoche***

As a record of the oral transmission of Mahamudra based on the instructions of the founder of the Drikung Kagyü lineage-Garchen Rinpoche, these teachings are of immeasurable value. As a student of Mahamudra, Khenpo Gyaltshen has found that maintaining some record of oral instructions which subsequently can be reflected upon and serve as a guide for practice to be helpful. To have the written guide be consistent with the teachings, he transcribed and edited these teachings, with Garchen Rinpoche's blessings, to preserve one more jewel from the land of Tibet for the benefit of living beings. Within the lineage tradition, which define the path of Mahamudra to consist of listening to, reflecting on, and meditating according to the teachings. This is typical oral tradition in spiritual practices of ancient Eastern culture (Barth, Ed., 2011).

This Mahamudra tradition was hidden from the outsiders due to language and cultural barriers. From Khenpo Könchog Gyaltshen's translation, this specific tantric practice becomes available to public in both written manual and explaining how certain practices benefit the body and the mind. This descriptive instructions and explanation of the teachings in tradition provide the readers with not only knowledge but reasons for applying those practices in one's daily life. For instance, there is this practice to improve clarity of the mind, "Ignorance and Sleep Dawning as Wisdom". The practitioner repeats these three sounds: OM, AH, HUM before going to sleep. He/she visualizes the clarity nature as a light; he/she breathes in, OM; then with the wind or air inside, AH; and when he/she breathes out, HUM. Anyone can do this when going to sleep for purification of the sleep and of the ignorance.

II.1.9. ***ZEN Training- A Physical Approach to Meditation and Mind-Body Training***

This is a comprehensive guide to the principles, practices, and philosophy of Zen training. Omori, a renowned Zen master, offers a detailed account of the foundational elements

of Zen, including its historical background, spiritual goals, and specific practices. The book is both an introduction for beginners and a deeper insight for more experienced practitioners, exploring Zen's path to enlightenment through meditation and mindfulness.

The central focus of the book is on *zazen*-sitting meditation, the core meditation practice in Zen, which Omori emphasizes as the primary method for cultivating awareness, concentration, and ultimately, enlightenment. He explains how zazen is not just about sitting in stillness but about deeply observing one's mind and transcending the ego, allowing the practitioner to experience a direct connection with reality as it is. Only through consistent practice, one can break free from the distractions of the ego and attachments, leading to a profound experience of clarity and peace (Sogen, 2020).

The book is relevant to this paper because of its instruction on specific practices for both body and mind. There are illustrations of positions of sitting mediation that relate to the body; and the explanation of how such postures benefit the awareness of the body center of gravity, also known as *hara* or *dantian*. Detailed instructions of breathing while in sitting in such positions provide the readers logistics of how such breathing affect the energy flow within the physical body; and in return how this flow helps calm the mind. It points out the importance of maintaining the energy balance between the head and low abdomen regions as a method to have clear mind while contemplating on the "true self", which eventually leading to realization of the "non self".

II.1.10. *10% Happier: How I tamed the Voice in My Head*

Harris, a successful ABC News anchor, begins the book by recounting his on-air panic attack, a pivotal moment that led him to confront the anxiety and internal chaos that had been building in his life due to career pressure, drug use, and unresolved emotional issues. Realizing

something needed to change, Harris embarks on a journey through the self-help world, initially with deep skepticism. His encounters with self-help personalities like Eckhart Tolle and Deepak Chopra often reveal their ideas to be vague or overly mystical for his journalistic mindset. However, his curiosity leads him to Buddhism and, more specifically, the practice of mindfulness meditation.

Harris eventually finds that meditation—a discipline he once dismissed as "weird"—provides concrete benefits, including greater emotional control, reduced stress, and increased focus. He learns that mindfulness allows him to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively to situations. Importantly, he discovers that adopting meditation doesn't mean losing ambition or competitive drive. Instead, it helps him become what he describes as "10% happier"—a modest but meaningful improvement that accumulates over time (Dan Harris, 2014).

II.1.11. ***The Urban Monk: Eastern Wisdom and Modern Hacks***

This is a practical guide that blends ancient Eastern wisdom with modern life hacks to help busy, urban individuals find balance, clarity, and purpose in a chaotic world. Shojai, a former Taoist monk and physician of Eastern medicine, presents a holistic approach to well-being that addresses the body, mind, and spirit—all within the context of a demanding modern lifestyle.

At the core of the book is the idea that modern life often pulls us in too many directions, leading to burnout, stress, and a sense of disconnection. Shojai argues that by reorienting our time, energy, and focus, we can take control of our lives and reclaim a deeper sense of peace and meaning. He introduces simple but powerful daily practices, including mindfulness, breathwork, qigong (energy movement), nutrition, and time management strategies, all designed to be

integrated into a hectic schedule. The guideline from this book is a perfect example of harmonious blend of Buddhist and Daoist practices in daily life (Shojai, 2016).

II.1.12. *Train Your Mind Change Your Brain: A New Science*

This is the groundbreaking Collaboration between Neuroscience and Buddhism. It is possible to change the structure and function of the brain, meaning “new neurons for old brains”. The book also reports how sensory experience reshapes adult brains as well as proves activity can change the brain. In other words, science of neuroplasticity discovers and explains about the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. The book highlights how mental states, such as thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, can physically shape the brain, promoting both healing and growth. There is discussion how practices like meditation, mindfulness, and cognitive exercises can lead to lasting changes in brain structure and function (Begley, 2007).

The book emphasizes that the mind's influence over the brain is a powerful tool for personal transformation. Begley stresses that we are not passive recipients of genetic fate but active participants in shaping our mental and emotional landscapes. Ultimately, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* offers an optimistic and empowering perspective, suggesting that anyone, at any age, can harness the brain's plasticity to improve their well-being and mental resilience.

Drawing on cutting-edge research in neuroscience, psychology, and psychiatry, Begley explains that the brain is not a fixed, static organ, but one that remains adaptable throughout adulthood. She describes various studies showing how consistent mental training—such as meditation—can increase grey matter in areas related to emotional regulation, focus, and memory. This contradicts the long-standing belief that the brain stops changing after a certain age.

Begley also discusses the implications of neuroplasticity for mental health. She explores how cognitive therapy and mindfulness practices can alleviate conditions like depression, anxiety, and chronic pain by reprogramming dysfunctional brain patterns. Additionally, she addresses the role of neuroplasticity in aging and recovery from injury, illustrating how the brain can compensate for damage and even enhance its capabilities with practice.

II.1.13. *The Paradox of Becoming*

The author points out that the teachings on the 12 links and the 16 exercises of mindfulness of breathing are core early teachings; and they are older than the teachings on Buddhist "three marks of existence" and the *Satipatthana Sutta*. In this book, he has commentaries and analysis of the several discourses from the Nikayas in which dependence originations and the conditions for becoming are discussed. Becoming (*bhava*) in this sense is the forming of the body in human world, or in the existence nature of the equivalent frequency of that consciousness being. Craving is a very important link of which we can work on to alter its results (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2008).

In relevance to this paper, the book analyzes the Buddha's teachings on how the mind starting from consciousness creates the body through the sequence of the twelve dependence originations. The author emphasizes on craving in real life is the link that we as human can work on to reduce and eliminate suffering of both body and mind. In this book, the author analyzes how the Buddha's teaching on sixteen exercises of mindfulness can be practiced for increase one's ability to recognize and manage one's craving. These exercises always start with breathing meditation, a classic example of how body and mind are interconnected and in separatable.

II.1.14. Other Authors and Their Literatures:

In terms of Buddhist philosophy and psychology, Bikkhu Bodhi translated and explained the commentaries on the Buddha's teachings that was recorded in *Abhidhammatha Sangaha: a Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma.* According to Bikkhu Bodhi, this version of Abhidhamma has the most popularity in the study since the twelfth century until present due to its "remarkable balance between concision and comprehensiveness". The Abhidhamma Pitaka, the third basket of the Pali Canon in Theravāda Buddhism. Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, with detailed explanatory commentary, makes the complex system of Abhidhamma accessible to modern readers. There are concepts and descriptions of citta (consciousness), cetasika (mental factors), the interaction between these two, the process of cognition, analysis of material phenomena (rūpa), the conventional versus the ultimate realities, paṭicca-samuppāda (dependent origination), meditation and the path to nibbana-the unconditioned reality. With this manuscript work, the author opens the door for younger generations of the West culture learn how the Buddhist scholars and practitioners analyze and describe the mind, both its components and transformation process in daily life (Bikkhu Bodhi, 2000).

In *Understanding Our Mind*, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh offers a reader-friendly yet profound exploration of Buddhist psychology, drawing from the Store-Consciousness (Alaya Vijnana) teachings in the Yogācāra school. The book presents the mind as a dynamic interplay between store consciousness (the deep base where all experiences and seeds are stored) and mind consciousness (Manas, seeds of delusion). Through this lens, he explains how our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions are conditioned and how they can be transformed.

Thich Nhat Hanh describes seeds (bija) as the core of mental formations—anger, joy, mindfulness, etc.—which lie dormant in the store consciousness and manifest when conditions are right. By practicing mindfulness, we can "water" wholesome seeds (like compassion) and

avoid reinforcing unwholesome ones (like fear). He emphasizes non-duality, the interconnectedness of all mental states, and the importance of conscious breathing and presence to heal and transform suffering. Blending psychology, Buddhist philosophy, and meditation practice, the book is both practical and spiritual—inviting readers to take compassionate care of their minds and to live with greater clarity and peace (Thich, 2006).

II.2. Daoist Readings:

II.2.1 *Daoist Body Cultivation: traditional Models and Contemporary Practices*

The book explores the ancient practices and philosophies of Daoist body cultivation, which involve physical, mental, and spiritual development. There are various methods of body cultivation found in Daoist traditions, such as qigong, tai chi, breathing exercises, and meditation, emphasizing their role in promoting balance, energy flow, and longevity. These practices are designed for harmonizing the body and mind with the Dao-the fundamental force or principle of the universe. Kohn highlights the importance of *self-cultivation* in Daoist thought, which involves the continuous process of refining oneself through disciplined practice, ethical living, and meditation. This process helps to transform the body into a vessel for spiritual growth and harmonizes the individual with the broader forces of nature. The concept of *non-action (wu wei)* is also emphasized in Daoist practice, which suggests that true cultivation arises from naturalness and spontaneity rather than forceful effort (Kohn, Ed., 2006).

The book also explores the historical evolution of Daoist body cultivation from its early roots in ancient China to its more contemporary forms. Kohn discusses the diverse schools of thought within Daoism, such as religious Daoism, philosophical Daoism, and Daoist alchemy, and how they each contribute to body cultivation practices. For example, Daoist alchemy seeks

spiritual transformation through the refinement of the body and mind, often symbolized by the quest for immortality or transcendence.

II.2.3. *Taoism: The Road to Immortality*

In Early Daoism, the concepts of Five Elements, I-Ching, Herbal medicine, and other shamanic practices belong to village shamanic mode of knowledge production; whereas internal alchemy is classified as city-state yogic mode. In chapter "The Yellow and the White" of the book "*Taoism*: *The Road to Immortality"* by John Blofeld, internal alchemy has been described and discussed in great details, which is very precious guidance for those who wish to seek the Dao or the Enlightenment.

He introduces the concept of Daoist internal alchemy more for spiritual practice than for earthly desire life. Human body is a mini cosmos; and both have three treasures: Jing (Essence), Qi (Vitality), Shen (Spirit). In table form, the author describes the Jing-Qi-Shen existence at three 3 levels: coarse form, subtle form, and cosmic form. Internal alchemy practice has stages for transmutation from Jing to Qi, from Qi to Shen, and from Shen merging into the Dao. Among the ingredients for internal alchemy, stillness is the most essential one. The others include wu wei (no activity), one's jing-qi-shen, one's life-force, restraint, and meditation (Blofeld, 2000).

II.2.4. *Daoist Internal Alchemy as a Model for Understanding Buddhist Three-fold Monastic Training*

Daoist theory on the three treasures of human body as Ching-Chi-Shen are the Essence, Breath, and Spirit. These three can be translated into another set of terms as Essence-Vital Energy-Mind. There is the clarification on the difference between the heart-mind and the conceptual mind. To the readers in the West, mind is often understood as the conceptual mind,

the thinking and reasoning function. However, for the Eastern cultures and practices, the mind often involves the heart-mind, the thinking and knowing function but also with sensing and feeling, the deeper level of intuitive awareness.

The *Dao* as the primordial ground of undifferentiated state that gave rise to forward cosmic forming of dense matters. This process of forward forming from non-matter to subtle form to dense matters is called *shun*-"flowing the course". In human manifestation, that is from shen (mind) to ching (body). Daoist internal alchemy-neidan- has the *ni* process "inverting the course" within the body from essence to energy to the heart-mind and eventually emerging with the Dao. According to the Wuzhen Pian text, there are 4 steps: "1) laying the foundations, 2) refining Essence to transmute it into Breath, 3) refining Breath to transmute it into Spirit, 4) refining Spirit to return to Dao-Emptiness." There is a link in history and teachings between Buddhism and Daoism. Knowing the Daoist breathing technique can help the Buddhist monks and nuns improve their physical health and facilitate the keeping of their precepts being more natural (Freese, 2018).

II.2.5. *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*

The author provides a comprehensive exploration of the Siddha traditions, which are mystical, alchemical, and yogic systems that originated in medieval India. The book examines these traditions from historical, cultural, and philosophical perspectives, focusing on the transformation of both the physical body and "the self"-the spiritual existence. The Siddhas were spiritual adepts in medieval India, particularly associated with Tamil, Bengali, and other regional traditions. They aimed to achieve physical immortality, spiritual liberation (moksha), and mastery over both the body and the mind. Their practices often integrated physical alchemy, yoga, and esoteric rituals (White, 2007). The following concepts reflect a very different theory

and practice as compared to the current conventional knowledge and practice for human physical and mental health.

1. **Alchemical Practices**: The book highlights the alchemical components of Siddha traditions, which involved the use of medicinal herbs, metals, and spiritual practices to transform the physical body. Central to these practices was the belief in achieving immortality or "body perfection" through the manipulation of substances like mercury and gold, as well as through mastery over the body's energies.

2. **Transformation of the Body**: One of the central themes of the book is the transformation of the body. The Siddhas sought to transcend the limitations of the physical body through spiritual and alchemical practices, turning it into a vessel for divine consciousness and achieving a state of physical and spiritual purity.

3. **Yoga and Spiritual Practice**: Yoga is a core element of the Siddha tradition, and the book outlines how Siddhas used various yogic practices—especially breath control (pranayama), meditation, and postures—to purify the body and mind. These practices were not only physical exercises but also spiritual techniques to unite the practitioner with the divine.

4. **The Concept of "Elixir"**: A significant part of the Siddha alchemical process involved the creation of an "elixir," a substance believed to extend life and bestow spiritual wisdom. The process of creating this elixir mirrored the internal alchemical processes that Siddhas believed were necessary for spiritual enlightenment and bodily transformation.

5. **Philosophy of the Body and Spirit**: The Siddha tradition holds that the body is a microcosm of the universe, and by transforming it, one can achieve a direct connection

with the divine. This is contrasted with the conventional view of the body as a mere material object to be transcended. Instead, the Siddhas viewed the body as a vehicle for spiritual transformation and enlightenment.

6. **Historical and Cultural Context**: White situates the Siddha traditions within the broader cultural and religious contexts of medieval India, comparing them to other mystical and esoteric traditions, including Tantric practices and the yogic systems. The book explores the philosophical underpinnings of these practices, including the belief in the interconnectedness of all things and the potential for human beings to access divine powers through spiritual discipline.

7. **Siddhas and Their Legacy**: The book also touches on the ongoing influence of Siddha traditions in modern India, particularly in Tamil culture. While the practices and philosophies of the Siddhas were highly localized, their influence on later mystical traditions, including the development of the Hatha Yoga and Ayurvedic medicine systems, is significant.

In summary, *The Alchemical Body* offers a detailed examination of the mystical and alchemical practices of the Siddha traditions in medieval India. It shows how the transformation of the body through alchemy, yoga, and meditation was central to the Siddha pursuit of immortality, spiritual liberation, and union with the divine. Through historical and philosophical analysis, the book reveals how the Siddhas' view of the body as both a material and spiritual entity continues to influence contemporary Indian spiritual practices.

II.2.6. *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine*

Huang Di Nei Jing (*Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine*), original note from Wang Bing of the Tang dynasty, translated by Wu Liansheng and Wu Qi, is a foundational text of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), attributed to the legendary Yellow Emperor. The book is divided into two parts: the *Suwen* (Basic Questions) and the *Lingshu* (Miraculous Pivot). It covers a wide range of topics, including the theory of Yin and Yang, the Five Elements, the flow of Qi (vital energy), and the importance of balance between the body and nature for maintaining health. The text emphasizes the significance of lifestyle, diet, and emotional well-being in preventing disease and fostering long-term health.

The *Suwen* focuses on the philosophical and diagnostic aspects of TCM, while the *Lingshu* deals primarily with the practice of acupuncture, describing techniques and specific points on the body used to restore balance. Wu's translation brings these ancient teachings to a modern audience, helping readers understand the holistic nature of Chinese medicine, which views health as a dynamic balance between the internal body and the external environment. This work continues to serve as a key resource for understanding the principles and practices that form the basis of TCM (Wang, 2002).

In relevance to this paper, the classic text describes energy channels in the body and how this network of energy affects the physical and mental health. This system is considered more detailed compared to Daoist microcosmic breathing. Daoist microcosmic breathing involves front and back channels flowing through midline body forming the enclosed loop for essence energy to flow through. Branching of from this system is the qi flow channel network described in details with fourteen main channels (*jing*) and eight extra meridians and countless horizontal smaller pathways (*luo*). The acupuncture field utilizes this knowledge and experience to perform activation at certain points on certain channels to balance the body energy in health maintenance

and illness treatment. Qigong and Taijiquan practices using breathing and series of movements to activate and harmonize energy in these channels for both physical and mental health.

II.2.7. *Daoist Body in Internal Alchemy*

Pieters's article titled "*Daoist Body in Internal Alchemy: An exploration of the first stage of internal alchemy*" explores Daoist internal alchemy (Neidan), specifically comparing the cosmological views of the body and the initial stages of practice in the Longmen and Zhengyi Dao traditions. It begins by establishing a foundation in Chinese/Daoist cosmology, explaining concepts like Dao, Yin-Yang theory, the five elements, and the various microcosmic bodies (cosmic, national, social) that the personal body reflects. The core difference highlighted between the two traditions lies in their approach to cultivation: Longmen emphasizes "doing" and conscious effort, including clearing specific energy vessels through methods like inverted breathing, while Zhengyi Dao advocates for "non-doing" (wuwei) through natural processes like proper nourishment, movement, and effortless meditation, believing that alchemy occurs spontaneously when one aligns with the inherent self-resolving nature of reality. Both traditions, however, share the fundamental view of the human body as a compound of jing, qi, and shen and a reflection of cosmic principles (Pieters, 2017).

II.2.8. *Journey to Taiji Life*

The author, a Chinese immigrant to US shore in the 1930's, was one of the first Taiji instructor in Orange County, California state during the 1980's**.** He learned Taijiquan at very age in San Francisco, in the 1940s, the time that only Chinese immigrants learned Chinese martial arts. The Chinese masters in Taijiquan and other martial arts refused to teach to "waigua ren", outsiders to the Chinese people. To him, learning Taiji exercise is to learn the Daoist philosophy and the way of life, a strong sense of cultural heritage. He represents the modern time Taijiquan

practitioners who have engineer career for a living and practicing the Daoist exercise for their own health benefit as well as satisfying their passionate quests in exploring Daoist philosophy and lifestyle. Indeed, he lived healthy life until his mid ninety years of age during which he only had to see doctor for yearly checkups. To keep ancient wisdom transmitted to the younger generations, he describes how to breath the Daoist way from simple method to the advanced level in clear instructions to his students. He stresses that the secret of Taijiquan and Taiji life is to practice (Lem, 2015).

II.2.9. *Aikitaichi: Medicine and Martial Art for Health*

The author has been well respected in the Aikido, Taichi, Acupuncture, and Aikitaichi for Health movements in Vietnam since the 1980s until now. In this book, he lists the core philosophy and theories in Daoist internal alchemy and the practices for both health and martial art purposes. Being a practitioner, he wrote instructions and explanation in clear and succinct style for anyone who wishes to learn and practice on daily basis for health maintenance. As for the specific martial arts, he lists out the key points for the martial artists to practice their internal energy in Daoist way. This part is for advance practitioners. Being thorough in classic and simplified Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese, he can explain the meanings of technical terms in Daoist trainings and Taichi movements. These are gem stones because without understanding the names of those exercises correctly, the practitioners cannot successfully navigate their intentions for regulating the energy which is the ultimate goal for all movements by the physical body parts (Truong, 2015).

II.2.10. *The Dao of Chinese Medicine: Understanding an Ancient Healing Art*

This book is a comprehensive introduction to the principles, philosophy, and practices that underpin traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The book offers an insightful exploration of

the Daoist worldview that serves as the foundation for Chinese medicine and explains how this worldview influences the way health, disease, and treatment are understood in the TCM system.

Kendall begins by introducing the core philosophical concepts of Daoism, such as the Dao (the natural way of the universe), Yin and Yang (the dual forces that govern all phenomena), and the Five Elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water). These concepts are central to understanding the functioning of the body, the dynamics of health, and the pathologies that arise when harmony is disrupted. The book emphasizes the importance of balance and the interconnectedness of all aspects of life, from the environment to the human body and mind (Kendall, 2002).

III. FINDINGS:

Though the literature review is mainly from Buddhist and Daoist texts, it is more reader-friendly to brief the readers on the basic information of how conventional health care view of human body and its mental counterpart. That way, the readers have some baseline to match and to compare to the Buddhist and Daoist views on body and mind.

III.1. Human Body and Mind in the Conventional Health Care:

Most of us have general idea of human body is made of bone, ligaments, tendons, muscles, fat, soft tissues, skin, hair, and all the blood, body fluids, nerves, vessels and some space. By understandings of modern medical world, human mind often is linked with cognitive functions with to recognize, to think, to reason, to feel, to make decision. That combination means mental activities which are dictated by the brain activities linking with the rest of the body through nerve signals of electrical impulses, chemicals, neurotransmitters, and hormones of the endocrine system. The nervous system has two: central and peripheral. The central has the brain and spinal cord. The peripheral has autonomic and somatic. The autonomic has sympathetic,

parasympathetic; it regulates involuntary function such as heartrate, eyelid reflex, etc. Most of internal organs operate under autonomic nervous system. The somatic system regulates voluntary actions such as running, breathing, exercising, reading, etc… While the mind is deeply tied to the brain, it's not fully understood whether it can be entirely explained by physical processes in the brain alone (Marieb and Hoehn, 2018).

Philosophically, the mind is often distinguished from the body. Some view it as a non-material entity, while others see it as a product of physical processes in the brain. In psychology, the mind is typically seen as encompassing mental processes such as attention, memory, reasoning, and perception, often studied alongside behavior and emotions. In simple terms, the mind can be thought of as the "software" that governs mental functions, while the brain is the "hardware" that supports it. However, the relationship between the two is still a subject of much debate and research in fields like neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy. Buddhist and Daoist understandings on body and mind can give countless opportunities for the neuroscientists to explore and explain how and why those practices can benefit human health.

Also, from the literature review and extensive dharma learning throughout the master program, the findings are classified and listed in the next section.

III.2 Buddhist View of the body and mind:

Since Sakya Buddha's time until now, there have been roughly two major sources from which we can find the discussion about body and mind. One is directly from the sacred texts belonging to the Tripitaka, the three baskets of Buddhist texts including Sutras, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma. The second source includes unlimited collections and discussions of the Buddhist practitioners and scholars in the past twenty-six centuries.

III.2.1. From the sacred text - Samyutta Nikaya (SN):

From Dhammabodhi's *An Anthology of 50 Discourses from the Samyutta,* one can see how the Buddha described human existence in both body and mind. Under Nidānasamyutta (Chapter on the Links of Dependent Origination), the Buddha introduced one important theory on body and mind to the world. In SN 12.1 Paṭiccasamuppādasutta (Dependent Origination), there are 12 links in this order: (1) ignorance, (2) volition or intension, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form (mind and body), (5) six sense fields, (6) contact, (7) sensation, (8) craving, (9) grasping, (10) becoming, (11) birth, (12) old age and death. In SN 12:2 Vibhaṅgasutta (Analysis), the Buddha explained how each link is the condition for the following link.

Then, the Buddha explained human existence in five aggregates classification. In *SN 22.1 Nakulapitusutta (Nakula's Father)* discourse, the five aggregates in which the first one pertains to body, and the other four describe human mind. In order, they are listed as: 1) form/body/the 4 elements, 2) sensation, 3) perception, 4) intention/emotion, and 5) consciousness.

In the Buddha's eyes, the very first stage is ignorance, for he mastered the Wisdom of Full Enlightenment to end that chain of *samsara* cycle, the endless cycle of rebirths within the three realms -Desire, Form, and Non-form. But at our level of conventional understanding, human body starts at birth with six senses for contacting with the environment known as the six sense fields. Regarding to the six sense fields, the modern understandings of human anatomy physiology and neurology match with the Buddhist description.

In the dharma teaching on Salāyatanasamyutta (on the Six Sense Fields), the Buddha taught his disciples how to reduce suffering with the understanding of these senses and their fields. SN 35.1 Ajjhattāniccasutta (The Interior as Impermanent) lists six senses include the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. SN 35.4 Bāhirāniccasutta (The Exterior as

Impermanent) lists the six sense fields include sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts.

If the teaching on the six sense fields helps us be aware of human body, SN 36.6 Sallasutta (An Arrow) guides us to be able to distinguish the difference between physical sensation (the first arrow) and mental sensation (the second arrow). They are like two arrows which humans encounter very often in daily life. We should not let the second arrow hit. The teaching in this discourse relates to the links of *contact, sensation, craving, and grasping*. It is important to know the difference between sensation and craving. Sensation is merely a neurological function at the body level. Craving is a *sankhara*, more like a habitual greed which belongs to operation at the mind level.

Bojjhangasamyutta- Linked Discourses on the Awakening Factors

SN 46.31 Paṭhamakusalasutta (Skillfull (1st)) The teaching lists seven awakening factors that a practitioner can develop and cultivate to be skillful in ending suffering. The order of those factors is: 1) the awakening factors of mindfulness, 2) investigation of principles, 3) energy, 4) rapture, 5) tranquility, 6) immersion, and 7) equanimity, which rely on seclusion, fading away, and cessation, and ripen as letting go. These are the techniques for Buddhist practitioners to carry out under specific guidance from their religious masters or meditation instructors. In other words, just by reading these terms, one cannot be able to reduce or end suffering, physically and mentally.

1. breathe in long, breathe out long, 2. breathe in short, breathe out short,

3. experience whole body breathe in, experience whole body breathe out,

4. calming body sankhara (habit energy) breathe in, calming body sankhara (habit energy) breathe out,

5. experiencing rapture breathing in, experiencing rapture breathing out,

6. Experiencing bliss breathing in, experiencing bliss breathing out,

7. Experiencing heart-mind sankhara breathing in, experiencing heart-mind sankhara breathing out,

8. Calming heart-mind sankhara breathing in, calming heart-mind sankhara breathing out,

9. Experiencing heart-mind breathing in, experiencing heart-mind breathing out,

10. Gladdening the heart-mind breathing in, gladdening the heart-mind breathing out,

11. Immersing heart-mind in samadhi breathing in, immersing heart-mind in samadhi breathing out,

12. liberating the hearth-mind breathing in, liberating the heart-mind breathing out,

13. contemplating impermanence breathing in, contemplating impermanence breathing out

14. contemplating dispassion breathing in, contemplating dispassion breathing out,

15. contemplating cessation breathing in, contemplating cessation breathing out,

16. contemplating letting go breathing in, contemplating letting go breathing out.

III.2.2. From the works of the contemporary scholars:

Buddhist view on human BODY:

The great monastic universities of the premodern period such as Nalanda in north-eastern India, included medicine in the monastic curriculum (Salguero, 2022). The early layers of Buddhist texts describe the physical body as the combination of the "four great elements": Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind. While many Buddhist trainings as we see nowadays emphasize on detachment from material world, the early Buddhist texts recorded medical care for monastics.

Moreover, commentaries and teachings form those texts valued the physician's roles as well as mentioned remedies to cure or alleviate the suffering of illness.

Illness is one of the four sufferings, beside birth, old age, and death. There are two approaches, treating and preventing the illness; this runs parallel to the practice of alleviating and ceasing the sufferings. Buddhism offers many forms of meditation to guide practitioners to contemplate the impermanence of the Elements, physical structures, and bodily sensations.

According to Salguero's *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine,* medicine was also the recurring theme in the *Vinayas*, the books of monastic ethic codes. The Buddhist practitioners need to understand and work with the body in accordance with the precepts of their levels of ordination. The model physician in the Buddha's time, Jīvaka Kaumārabhṛtya, was mentioned in the many discourses. In Thailand and other Buddhist countries, his statue is honored as the forefather of traditional medicine. The book highlights modern research and clinical applications of these techniques in contemporary Western medicine, where mindfulness-based therapies and meditation practices are increasingly used to treat a variety of physical and psychological conditions.

In *Tantric or Vajrayana* tradition, Tantric Buddhism and Tantric Medicine are not separate as we in the West distinguish medical field from religious practice. In Janet Gyatso's book, the history of Buddhist Tibetan medicine has been documented and laid out the readers to explore. Religious ritual is a part of treating illnesses in Tibetan medical field. There are the massive four-volume commentary to the twelfth-century medical root text *Four Treaties,* written by Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653-1705) who was the famous regent after the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. He designed and commissioned for those medical paintings to be created. Exquisite tangka scrolls portray in meticulous detail the anatomy, materia medica, diagnostics,

therapeutics, pathologies, and healthy and deleterious forces that determine the human condition. The unique detail on how the Four Treaties were written as the words from the Medicine Buddha, the way medical text got inserted into canonical text category. Within this medical texts, appearance of patients with certain illnesses as well as charts of complex network of energetic pathways and centers are illustrated by vivid paintings (Gyatso, 2015).

Regarding to view on human body, Tantric tradition also provides the background with the Buddha's teachings on suffering, impermanence, and the interdependence of all phenomena, suggesting that these insights help cultivate a deeper understanding of the self and the world. Even in Tibetan medical theory and practice, everyone accepts the concept that being human, is about confronting suffering, understanding the nature of attachment, and cultivating wisdom to overcome ignorance. The author introduces to the world Buddhist understanding of the mind and its transformative potential. She explores how practices like meditation, mindfulness, and ethical living enable individuals to navigate the challenges of existence. These practices, according to Gyatso, are not just tools for personal salvation, but also for fostering compassion and interconnectedness with others.

From the translation work of Elio Guarisco on Gyalwa Yangonpa's teachings on visions of the human energy structure, we discover another layer of fine matter making up our body. This is his *Hidden Description,* Yangonpa cites the passage from the *Nondual Victory Tantra* to explain the fundamental nature of the body (Yangonpa, p.42):

> "As to the body, by virtue of the five awakenings,
> Channels, vital essences,
> Unclean substances, and thoughts,
> The phenomenon of the body exists."

Gyalwa Yangonpa stressed that one needs to realize the fundamental nature of things on his/her spiritual path. The word *tantra* is translated as "continuity" or "continuum", of the true nature of the individual which is a state of timeless and perfect clarity. In practice of realization, there are causal continuum, method continuum, and resultant continuum also known as the "base, path, and fruit" in Dzogchen teaching. (p. 32).

With such deep level of realization, he explained in great details on the nature of the "vajra body", "subtle body" or "energy body," describing it as a complex system of energy pathways, centers, and winds (known as "lung" in Tibetan) that flow through the body. These energies are essential for maintaining physical health, mental clarity, and spiritual awakening. Within the subtle body, there are Chakras and Channels, the drawing from Tibetan Buddhist teachings. The importance of chakras (energy centers) and channels (nadis or tsa) is that they are the centers and roots where life force operates in the body. These energy centers influence our physical health and emotional balance. For example, the channel of arteries also has wind factor in it; if too much wind, the channel will pulsate strongly and that is not balance for both body and mind. In terms of practice, there are meditation and breathwork. Meditation practices, particularly those involving controlled breathing, are described as key methods for unlocking and harmonizing the energy flow within the body. These practices are essential for purifying the mind, balancing the energies, and facilitating spiritual growth.

The higher dimension of energetic existence would be Consciousness. Yangonpa's teaching also mentioned the relationship between the energy body and consciousness, proposing that by understanding and working with the subtle energy system, one can gain greater insight into the nature of the mind and the path to enlightenment. This process involves harnessing the energy of the body to clear mental obstacles and attain higher states of awareness. This leads to

healing and transformation. A significant aspect of the text is its focus on how energy imbalances manifest in the body, leading to illness or emotional distress. The author discusses various techniques, both physical (such as specific exercises) and meditative (like visualization), to restore balance and achieve healing.

The discussed techniques in which the practitioner would need to follow instruction from certain tantras to perform. In the fourth section of the Hidden Description, he summarized the practice and realization as "by way of the mutual interdependence of their coarse and subtle aspects, body, voice, and mind are an inseparable unity" (p. 99).

Along his philosophical and abstractive concepts, he also described and explained on more tangible concepts while still talking about the subtle body. For example, the word "life-pillar" used in tantra means the central channel running almost along the spine, but Yangonpa clarified that it is not the spinal cord. By highlighting the important function and balance of the central channel, he mentioned that when the "energy-wind and mind" enter the central channel, serious mental disorder will occur. Just by this example, one can see there is no clear distinction between physical body and the mind in Buddhist medical world. The energetic network is like a bridge between what the conventional medicine acknowledges body and mind, physical body and mental status. In other word, there is no clear separation of functioning body and mind in Buddhism. Things exist "as is", only human's habit of classifying or distinguishing creates the division and classification for the limited human mind to comprehend the reality.

At a more concrete and less abstractive level, in Zen tradition, the physical body alignment during meditation session is carefully explained to the beginners. They are instructed to focus on *tanden,* the Japanese word for center of gravity of the body located in low abdomen, and to be aware of the *hara* area as an anchor for body and mind during breathing in and out practice (Sogen, p. 41-43).

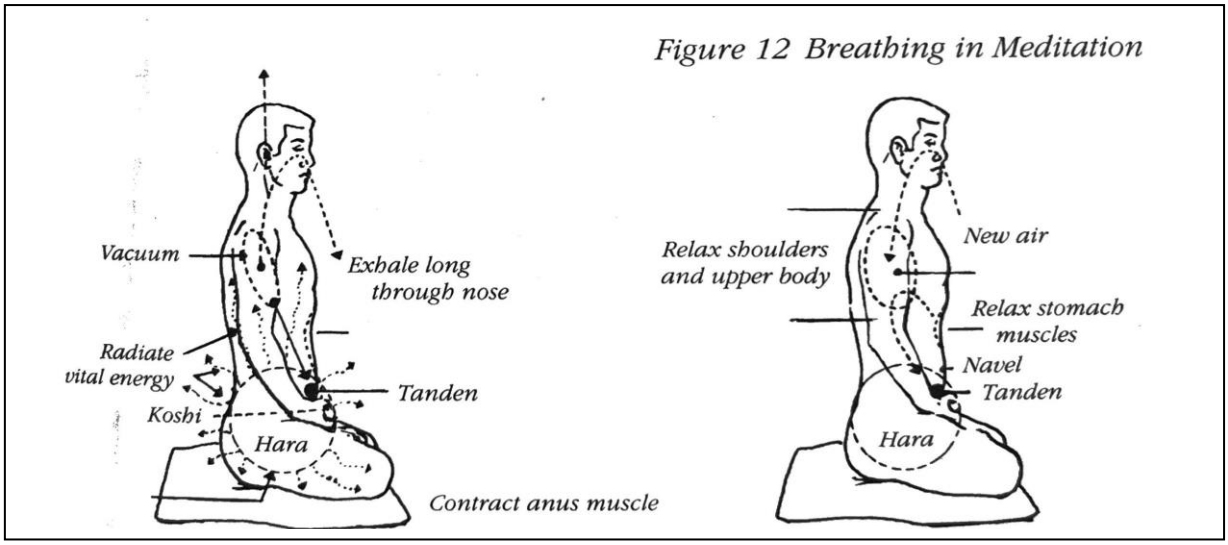


Figure 12 Breathing in Meditation

Buddhist view on human MIND:

In terms of Buddhist philosophy and psychology, Bikkhu Bodhi translated and explained the commentaries on the Buddha's teachings that was recorded in *Abhidhammatha Sangaha: a Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma.* According to Bikkhu Bodhi, this version of Abhidhamma has the most popularity in the study since the twelfth century until present due to its "remarkable balance between concision and comprehensiveness". The Abhidhamma Pitaka, the third basket of the Pali Canon in Theravāda Buddhism. Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, with detailed explanatory commentary, makes the complex system of Abhidhamma accessible to modern readers. There are concepts and descriptions of citta (consciousness), cetasika (mental factors), the interaction between these two, the process of cognition, analysis of material

phenomena (rūpa), the conventional versus the ultimate realities, paṭicca-samuppāda (dependent origination), meditation and the path to *nibbana*-the unconditioned reality. From the vocabulary used in this discussion, it is clearly the view of *Theravada Buddhist tradition*.

In *Mahayana tradition*, Abhidharma from Sanskrit collection has classified human mind into the eight consciousnesses of which the seventh (Manas) and the eighth (Alaya) consciousnesses are not well aware by general public and medical professionals in the West. By knowing how they exist and contribute to the well-being of a person, the clinician and patient can figure out how to manage the symptoms the best whether using medicine, psychological therapy or meditation. In *Understanding Our Mind,* Thích Nhất Hạnh translated and wrote his commentary to Vasubandhu's *Twenty and Thirty Verses*, the very important script of Abhidharma belonging to Consciousness Only school of Mahayana Buddhism. Within this book, the mind was categorized into eight consciousnesses in which the first five *sense consciousnesses* are based in the physical senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin). The sixth consciousness, *mind consciousness (manovijnana),* arises when our mind contacts an object of perception.

The seventh aspect, *manas*, is the part of consciousness that gives rise to and be the support of mind consciousness. The eighth aspect, *store consciousness (alayavijnana),* is the ground, or base, of the other seven consciousnesses. It's important to understand the structure of our mind/consciousness as the ground for the quest to explore human deep psyche.

Zen Tradition

In a less philosophical and more practical approach for discovering the mind through body training, Omori Sogen's instruction on Zen meets that objective. He explained adjusting the mind meaning to concentrate and unify the mind to attain samadhi state (Sogen, p. 52)

Also belonging to Mahayana tradition, there is a unique concept and technique in Zen tradition, *koans*- the paradoxical riddles or questions used in meditation to help break the rational mind's habitual thinking. The Zen master explains how koans are not puzzles to be solved with intellect but tools to awaken deeper, intuitive understanding. They help Zen students transcend conceptual thinking and directly experience reality. The essential Zen attitudes required for training include diligence, humility, and non-attachment. This tradition stresses the importance of mindfulness in everyday life, where the practitioner brings full attention to every action, whether it's eating, walking, or working, turning ordinary tasks into opportunities for Zen practice. Therefore, there is tight interconnection between body and mind; one cannot manifest without the other.

The integration of Zen principles into daily life is the key for practitioners to navigate their attention and mind in operating their body accurately and mindfully. Zen is not a separate, isolated activity, but a way of being in the world. The ultimate goal of Zen practice is to live with a mind free of dualistic thinking, to see beyond the illusions of self and other, and to act from a place of deep wisdom and compassion. In other words, the mind or the attention stays with the body action or inaction as much as possible. One of the challenges of Zen practice is to find or to have a Zen master or teacher in guiding the practitioner. Zen training is a lifelong journey that requires both dedication and patience. Once under safe guidance from the teacher, the serious practitioners in this training can discover their potential for achieving spiritual enlightenment and clarity.

The Kālacakra tradition

Also belonging to Vajrayana view and practice on body and mind, *the Kālacakra tradition* has the concept "the Body as a Text and the Text as the Body". With that concept, achieving right insight into one's own body as a tantric text is essential for spiritual

transformation. The tantric body is constructed based on a linguistic model of syllables, where consonants are seen as important and are identified as presiding deities of the nāḍīs and lords of the cakras. The body is thus a multi-volumed tantra, with each bodily constituent being an individual tantric text represented by groups of thirty-six syllables. This corporeal tantra, being finite and provisional, requires transformation into the definitive text through the method aspect of tantra (sādhanā). This process involves the mental dissolution of the embodied tantric text and its regeneration in a new form, such as a deity-maṇḍala, where consonants are encoded with new meanings through the "splicing" of vowels representing wisdom. Ultimately, in the Vajrayāna tradition, both the canonical tantric text and the physical body serve as vehicles for spiritual awakening, likened to a raft that is discarded once its purpose is fulfilled (Wallace, p.9).

Neurospasticity:

In 1997, there was a study on mice, young and old of their ages to compare how neurogenesis develops in their brains. The researchers, led by neuroscientist Fred “Rusty” Gage, found that even the senior mice, eighteen months old in mice equivalent to 65 years of human age, for those who live in a full of stimulation, an enriched environment, their new brain cells grew three folds as compared to their counterpart mice staying in the non-enriched environment. In this study, the neuroscientists specifically measured the formation and survival of neurons in the dentate gyrus area of the hippocampus that related to learning and memory. They concluded there was 15% of neuro volume increase just by changing experience from unstimulated boring environment to an enriched stimulation one. Whether the increase of brain cells relate to exercise, social behavior, or learning experience, it remains question of further studies (Begley, 2007).

Drawing on cutting-edge research in neuroscience, psychology, and psychiatry, Begley explains that the brain is not a fixed, static organ, but one that remains adaptable throughout adulthood. She describes various studies showing how consistent mental training—such as meditation—can increase grey matter in areas related to emotional regulation, focus, and memory. This contradicts the long-standing belief that the brain stops changing after a certain age. This leads to the implications of neuroplasticity for mental health. She explores how cognitive therapy and mindfulness practices can alleviate conditions like depression, anxiety, and chronic pain by reprogramming dysfunctional brain patterns. Additionally, she addresses the role of neuroplasticity in aging and recovery from injury, illustrating how the brain can compensate for damage and even enhance its capabilities with practice.

***Neuro-Dharma**: New Science, Ancient Wisdom, and Seven Practices*

If we consider anything can be seen or measurable belong to body, this exploration into neuro-science presents itself as the bridge between body and mind. Hanson draws on scientific research in neuroscience and psychology to explain how the brain works and why certain practices can make us happier. He gives insight into how certain brain structures, such as the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, are involved in processing emotions and how we can influence them with our habits and intentions.

The seven practices Hanson lists here originating from Buddhist teachings. To fill the void of happiness in modern busy life style, he calls them "The Seven Practices of Highest Happiness″, the seven core practices that can help individuals cultivate the highest forms of happiness. They include: awe and gratitude, resilience, compassion, mindfulness, loving-kindness, being present, and self-worth. Note that the self-worth here resembles Buddhist idea of non-attachment to external materials (Hanson, 2021).

III.2.3. From existing practice and traditions:

There are almost countless styles of Buddhist practices in the world. This paper only lists those traditions and practices that are popular and suitable for people in the U.S. In general, Asian Americans at late adulthood tend to go with Pure Land tradition due to its simple requirement and great promised result for peace of mind. Chanting and prostration are the main activities in this tradition. Meditation of variety of traditions is more popular among mainstream Americans who are younger people; most of them prefer scientific and analytical explanation of how this practice benefits their physical and mental health.

1. Chanting practice in general and in particular Pure Land tradition: popular in East Asian countries. They chant sutras or reciting the Amita Buddha's name (as in Pure Land tradition) or mantras (as influenced by Tantric tradition in Vietnamese Buddhism) - mostly in sitting positions; some in walking and reciting the names of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or walking around the prayer wheel while reciting the mantra "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" as in Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

2. The Four Foundations for Mindfulness - Vipassana: practitioners practice contemplating on body, sensations or feelings, mind, and dhammas or mental objects. This method was taught by the Buddha and written down in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Majjhima Nikaya 10: *The Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness*). Theravada tradition apply this teaching as meditation technique. Within that, the spreading of loving-kindness is a favorite practice for most people. In the US, Goenka Vipassana tradition is more popular to Americans since it has been organized into ten-day retreat with specific technique assigned for each practicing day. Americans are used to industrialized lifestyle with simple and specific instructions; they tend to shy away any abstractive concepts and practices.

3. Zen meditation as a part of Mahayana tradition:

It has the meditative technique of using koans - the paradoxical riddles or questions in meditation to help break the rational mind's habitual thinking. This method is for a selective group of people due to its abstractive and philosophical application in meditation. It used to be popular several decades ago from the outreach effort of the Japanese zen masters and it fill the void of cognitive and intellectual hunger amongst the Western materialistic lifestyle in that time.

4. Mahamudra meditation:

This practice is from Vajrayana tradition- *Drikung Kagyu.* In the US, it was first introduced to the public by H. E. Garchen Rinpoche in 1997. His disciple, Khenpo Könchog Gyaltshen, translated into English for practitioners in the Western society. In this tradition, there is this practice to improve clarity of the mind, "Ignorance and Sleep Dawning as Wisdom". During sleep, there is not any awareness or conscious thinking, the period with the significant state of ignorance in a twenty-four-hour day-night cycle. Therefore, it is very difficult to bring any kind of practice for the mind during sleep. Yet, there is one practice called the "vajra recitation" in which the practitioner repeats these three sounds: OM, AH, HUM before one goes to sleep. In one's heart, visualize the clarity nature as a light; he/she breathes in, OM; then with the wind or air inside, AH; and when he/she breathes out, HUM. Anyone can do this when going to sleep for purification of the sleep and of the ignorance (Barth, 2011).

The *Vajra Body* is a concept from Tibetan Buddhism, particularly within *Tantric* (Vajrayana) practice. It refers to a *subtle, energetic version of the body*—beyond the physical—that plays a central role in advanced spiritual transformation.

5. Kālacakra tradition:

The Kālacakra tradition in India views the body as a tantric text composed of mantras and letters. It maps out the mind-body complex with its operations, habitual reactions, and potential for transformation. Practitioners in this tradition purify their body with breathing exercises and reciting mantras in a particular resonance to achieve higher state of being. The name Kālacakra refers to the unity of the knowledge of the indestructible bliss where *kāla* means "time"; *cakra* means "wheel". This implies the practice does not only represent the Buddha's mind but also represents the body of sentient beings (Wallace, p.9). The Vajra Body is the vehicle through which practitioners transform ordinary consciousness into enlightened awareness. There are trainings to help practitioners be aware of: 1) channels (nadis or tsa), energy pathways that flow throughout the subtle body; 2) the wind (prana or lung), vital energies or life-force currents that move through the channels; 3) and drops (bindu or tigle), subtle essences, often associated with consciousness or bliss.

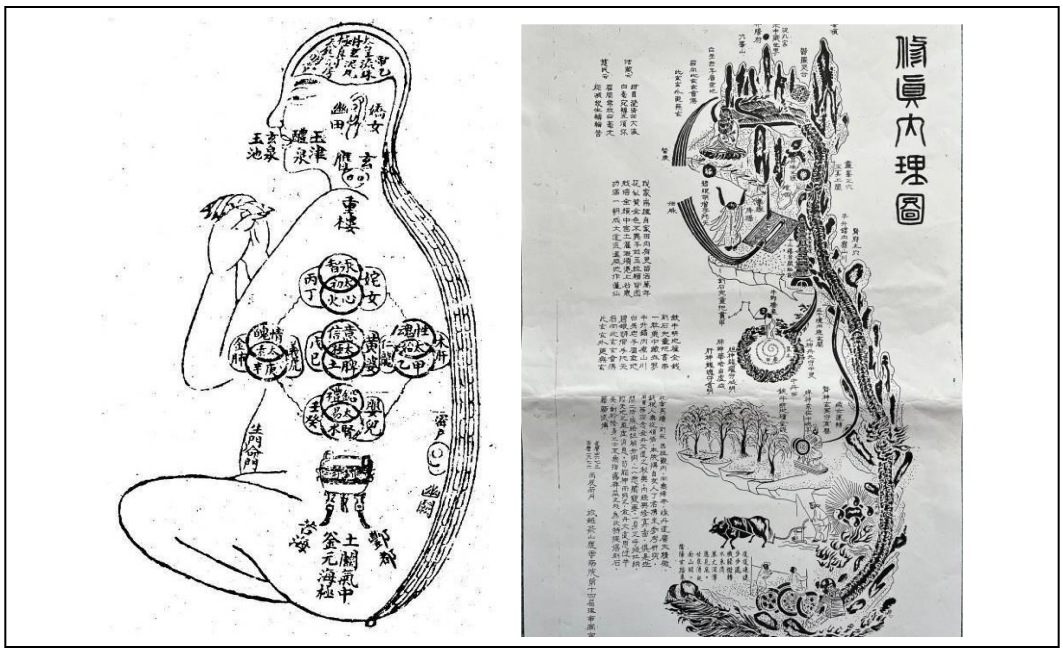
III.3 Daoist View of the body and mind:

In Daoism, human existence has three layers, also known as *the Three Treasures*: Jing (essence), Qi (energy force), and Shen (spiritual nature). In his teaching materials at Sakya Buddha University, professor John Freese summarizes John Blofeld's description of these three as follow:

	Coarse Form	***Subtle Form***	***Cosmic/Yang form***
Ching = Jing (Essence)	Not precisely identical but closely associated with and conveyed by, male and female sexual fluids	That within the body which gives matter tangible form and substance	That within the cosmos which gives tangible form to what was originally undifferentiated void

Ch'i = Qi ***(Vitality)***	Not precisely identical but closely associated with and conveyed in, the air breathed in through lungs, kidneys, and pores.	Vitality indistinguishable (except by temporary location) from its cosmic counterpart.	Cosmic vitality seen as *Te,* the virtue of the Tao with which each object is imbued.
Shen (Spirit)	Spirit not yet clensed of the impurities of the senses and of erroneous thought	Unsullied spirit released from the contamination of passion and sensuous longing	Cosmic spirit, void, pure, undifferentiated being.

Qi is the fundamental concept in Daoist theory and practice. It manifests in human body as the vitality of tangible forms ranking from the bone and tendon strength to sensations of the pulses [as a part of the heart beats] to subtle forms of breaths and the shining spirit in the eyes. At the cosmic level, it is the life force to keep the universe operating in order, to keep the Earth planet in regular seasons, to keep the harmony of all living creatures living in certain habitats as our modern concept of ecology. Daoist practitioners aim at cultivating "the real immortal elixir". There are two levels of this quest. At inferior quality level, it means longevity and retention of youthful vigor. At superior quality level, the internal alchemy practice enables the adept to



"transcend the world of mortals and attain to holy state." In Neidan practice, the true nature of internal alchemy is to reach the "Golden Pill", which means drawing upon cosmic essence, vitality, and spirit. With cosmic transformation, bodily transformation is wrought. In the meantime, cosmic vitality acts unceasingly. Cosmic life is free from defilement; and it endures to eternity. This concept has some similarity with the concept of Buddha Nature in Buddhism. Once the Shen transmutation into the Void, the elixir is perfected and Immortality is attained. At the highest stage of transformation, there is "perfect stillness" of awareness in which the mind of human]and Mind of the cosmos unified (Pieters, 2017).

There is yogic regimen for a Daoist to practice: a preliminary and an accompaniment to the eight-stage yoga. Preliminary includes: nourishing the body with moderation in diet clothing, sleep, bathing, and exercise; yogic breathing of regulating the qi; and ingestion of medicinal drugs. The eight stages are: [1-3] conservation, restoration, and transmutation of the body's Jing; [4-5] nourishment and transmutation of Qi; [6-7] nourishment and transmutation of Shen; and the transmutation of voided Shen. This last stage makes the voided Shen be identical with the Void in the cosmos, the Dao (or Tao). (Freese, 2018)

The more popular Daoist energy map in modern world is the acupuncture channels and acupoints chart. All principle and theories in acupuncture come from Daoist philosophy. Professor Kendall compiled the book highlighting how Chinese medicine views the human body as a microcosm of the universe. He discusses the flow of Qi (vital energy), the circulation through the body's meridians, and the ways in which these elements influence physical, emotional, and mental health. More important, he explored how Daoism's emphasis on living in harmony with nature influences the practice of Chinese medicine and how it encourages practitioners and patients alike to cultivate a balanced, holistic approach to health. The concept

of balance here is the balance between yin and yang, between physical and mental maintenance, balance between the five-element system within each individual.

The concept of the three cauldrons in Neidan cultivating is more ancient teaching than the Du-Ren breathing technique. Du channel, translated as Governing channel, runs along the spinal cord from the coccyx to the crown of the head; they are the two out of fourteen channels in the acupuncture channel map. Ren channel, translated as Conception channel, runs along the front midline of the body from philtrum at upper lip to the lowest part of the pelvic floor. In contemporary qigong and taijiquan classes, the instructors tend to guide the students to train breathing to bridge these two channels for completing the microcosmos qi flow (Lem, 2015).

Beside acupuncture and Chinese medicine, there are applications of yin-yang theory and the concept of three treasures into physical exercise: Taijiquan and Qigong. For many centuries, these two forms of practices have transformed from highly level of combat skills as in martial arts to exercise for health and longevity. In the US, Taijiquan (or Taichi) and Qigong are practiced for health maintenance and illness prevention.

The most popular exercise is Simplified 24-form Taichi. Next is the Yang style long-form Taichi. Besides, there are Wu style, Chen style, Hong style, Zhao Bao Taichi style, etc. Qigong has the famous *Baduan jin* (EightPieces of Silk Brocade) rooted from Daoist text Xiuzhen Shishu (Ten Treatises on Restoring the Original Vitality). (Komjathy, 2006)

III.4. Neuroscience Research updates:

III.4.1 Research done on Buddhist monks and meditators:

Rick Hanson references a number of neuroimaging studies in *Neurodharma* to explain how meditation impacts the brain. The key studies he highlights examine the brains of long-term meditators and reveal how meditation can produce measurable changes in brain structure and

function. One of the most important studies in this area comes from Richard Davidson and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who conducted research on the brain function of experienced meditators.

1. Richard Davidson's Study (2003):

In one landmark study, Richard Davidson and his team used EEG (electroencephalography) to study the brain activity of experienced Tibetan Buddhist monks who had been practicing compassion meditation for many years. They found that these long-term meditators exhibited greater activity in the left prefrontal cortex, an area associated with positive emotions, happiness, and a calm state of mind. This contrasted with the brain patterns of non-meditators, who had lower levels of left prefrontal activation. This suggests that long-term meditation can lead to changes in the brain that make it easier to experience positive emotions, even in challenging situations.

2) MRI Study on Meditation and Gray Matter (2011):

Another major study, led by Sara Lazar at Harvard University, used MRI scans to examine the brains of people who practiced mindfulness meditation. They found that people who practiced meditation regularly had increased gray matter density in regions associated with learning, memory, emotional regulation, and self-awareness, such as the *hippocampus, prefrontal cortex* (higher-order cognitive functions such as attention and decision-making)*, and insula* (involved in self-awareness and compassion). These structural changes suggest that meditation may not only improve emotional regulation but also enhance cognitive functions like memory and focus.

3) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Study (2010):

This study, led by Jon Kabat-Zinn (creator of the MBSR program), also employed brain

imaging techniques (MRI) to study how mindfulness meditation affects brain structure. They found that participants who underwent an 8-week MBSR program showed ***increases in gray matter density*** in the *hippocampus* and *prefrontal cortex* (areas associated with learning, memory, and emotional regulation), and a ***decrease in the size of the*** *amygdala* (which is associated with stress, fear, and anxiety). These changes suggested that mindfulness meditation could enhance brain areas related to positive emotional experiences while decreasing the brain's response to stress and anxiety.

III.4.2 Research done on Taichi and Qigong practitioners:

1) Tai Chi and Qigong affect Brain Functions: Recent Findings (2023):

A study published in 2023 in the *BMC Geriatrics* explored how Tai Chi and Qigong affects brain function and cognitive health in older adults. The research involved long-term Tai Chi practitioners (more than 10 years) and found significant neuroplastic changes -increased gray matter density in brain regions in their brains, especially in areas related to balance, motor control, and cognition. In addition, these practitioners have better white matter integrity in the *corpus callosum*, the structure that connects the two hemispheres of the brain, which is critical for motor coordination and communication between brain regions. (Park, et al., 2023)

2) Qigong and Cognitive Benefits:

A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2021 in *Frontiers in Psychology* examined multiple studies on *Qigong* and its impact on cognitive function, emotional regulation, and neuroplasticity. The review specifically highlighted studies focusing on Qigong practitioners with extensive experience in the practice. In their findings, there are: a) improved brain network connectivity, particularly in the default mode network (DMN), which is associated with self-

reflection, relaxation, and emotional processing; b) Increased hippocampal volume, which is associated with memory consolidation and emotional regulation; c) reduce stress by modulating the *hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis*, which plays a role in the stress response, suggesting that Qigong could be beneficial for mental health by reducing cortisol levels. (Liu, et al, 2021)

IV. DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS:

There is one very crucial point of distinction between how the Western world understand the word "mind" as compared to how the Eastern world do. To an average American, "mind" imply thinking, has something to do with mentality and the brain function. To the Eastern person, the word "mind", (translated from "citta" in Pali and Sanskrit, "xin" in Chinese pinyin, and "tâm" in Vietnamese) has connotation of heart-mind, which involve the knowing from sensing, not just knowing from thinking.

Another point of notice is in Chinese word of "shen" (spirit). This word implies the mind of more inclination toward spiritual world and will power of a person. The word "xin" (heart) implies the mind of more inclination toward sensing or feeling, more of compassion.

Only through learning in practice with the qualified teacher in the field, one can truly understand the theory and its application at human body level. Starting at this basic step of correct training exercises, he/she can gradually experience the energetic transformation before reaching the spiritual level of the mind. In twenty-six centuries of the transmission of these two popular traditions in the Eastern world, there have been some influences back and forth between the traditions within socio-cultural contexts. It explains why the Zen or Chan meditation practice has similarity with the Daoist meditation from the presentation to outsiders. In the Ming dynasty

of China, the emperors had policy of the uniting of three religions-Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. There was the phrase in China, "Confucian surface, Daoist Structure and Buddhist heart." (Giaimo, 2024)

Though the ultimate goal of Buddhist practitioners differs greatly from that of Daoist group, both traditions have common view on the understanding of the subtle body or energetic body beyond the physical body; and that by practicing certain training efforts, the practitioners can utilize the subtle body to transform the mind or the spiritual part of being. Buddhism and Daoism agree that mentality affects the perception of health and treatment, but their approaches differ. For Buddhists, illness is just a part of the general suffering in life, the first noble truth of the Buddha's realization. There are two ways to fight it. For some, meditation can become a tool to pinpoint where the problem stems from and fix it. For others, they just observe the impermanence of phenomenon and practice detachment his/her mind from it.

On the other side, Taoists do not view illness as a normal part of life. If someone is ill, it means that their body is just broken somehow. In the natural world, there are two opposite forces: Yin and the Yang. The balance of those two forces forms our world. If the Yin-Yang pair is out of balance, it influences Qi—the inner energy of the body. From a quick glance, it obviously Daoist view on human with the three treasures for self-cultivation has more optimistic and nurturing vibration. As compared to Buddhist view on human as the aggregates, delusion and full of sufferings which sounds very pessimistic and discouraging. However, once we explore, learn and practice one of the entry levels of Buddhist traditions, we will find it's as beneficial and optimistic as the Daoist view.

IV.1. Buddhist Theories and Practices:

IV.1.1. Theory

The literatures from the Buddhist scholars have dwelled into many technical details of philosophies and traditions. However, from the dawn of these two ways of life, the founders did not have intention to create the theory. The Buddha specifically went through the Path to attain liberation from sufferings and so he guided the way for his followers. Only with time people create writings and commentaries and classifying his teachings into ways that human beings of those times and spaces could comprehend and follow the practices up to their levels. And with that, traditions become different from each other, like the leaves and branches branching off one tree trunk.

Upon learning or studying any traditions and its theory, starting from the leaves, one should not forget the relative position of those leaves and branches to the main trunk.
The Buddha described human existence compiled by five aggregates, six senses and their fields and consciousness. While all these operate as human existence, the Buddha's teachings provide a bigger picture of existence, the *Twelve Dependence Originations*.

From the theory of Dependence Origination, the Buddha analyzed and taught his disciples how to recognize where the sufferings coming from. Among the practice traditions, Goenka tradition offers practical instruction and explanation for modern practitioners. It focuses on body sensations as the door to enter the process of liberating oneself from suffering by orderly going through observing and analyzing each stage of the 12 origination dependence links. In a way, this observing and contemplating process is the reverse order listed in the discourse. It starts by guiding the beginners to focus on body sensations (vedanā); then gradually lead to

being aware of their habit of *craving* (taṇhā), leading to the four attachments (*grasping,* upādāna), which leads to *becoming* (bhava). This endless process of becoming leads to *birth* (jāti). Once being born, we suffer from desire, disease, *old age, and death* (jarāmaraṇaṁ). Why this process of becoming? Because out of attachment (grasping) there is strong *reactions* (saṅkhārā) which make deep impression on the mind, a push to the flow of *consciousness*. What gives rise to attachment (upādāna)? It's the momentary reactions of liking or disliking, liking leads to craving (taṇhā), disliking leads to aversion – the mirror image of craving. This happens because of bodily *sensations* (vedanā). Why these sensations? Because there is contact (phassa) between our six senses and their particular objects (saḷāyatana); sense fields exist from physical senses and the mind (nāmarūpa), leading to consciousness. The flow of *consciousness* (viññāṇa) moment to moment comes from *mental reactions* (saṅkhārā), which occur because of ignorance (avijjā).

The technique of this tradition is to break the barrier between conscious and unconscious levels of the mind. At the unconscious level, ignorance avijjā, the mind keeps reacting to sensations one experiences, and there is no end for this process unless one decides to wake up from this state. Step one starts from this very body. At first, one reacts to sensations most of the time; with progression in the practice, one will be more at the conscious level and can stay equanimous to those. In other words, one can break the reaction saṅkhārā or volition in chain of 12 origination dependence links.

Habit of craving taṇhā of the mind is always accompanied by physical sensation. This craving habit multiplies one's misery, another word for suffering as one of the Four Noble Truths. This tradition creates a dynamic process for its practitioners to learn and practice to comprehend the Buddha's teachings on the 12 origination dependence links. Like a warrior

learning and practicing how to use the sword to cut through targets, the meditators in Goenka's tradition learn and practice how to cut through reaction saṅkhārā and ignorance avijjā through body scan technique. That is a tangible way to reduce and eventually to end suffering and find inner-peace or equanimity of the mind.

By repeating the impermanent nature of the six senses and their fields, the Buddha guided his followers the practice of supporting the stability of the mind. In our modern understanding, this training supports mental health in way of preventing psychological negativity that could occur from an unwanted change of the circumstance.

In three main traditions in Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, the views of human body and mind consistent with the school theories. Theravada tradition has the simplest way is to view human, as name and form. Form is equivalent to physical body as we understand in conventional world. Within this form, human body consists of the four great elements: earth, water, wind, and fire. "Name" or non-matter part of human existence has the rest of the 4 aggregates: sensation, perception, intention, and consciousness. The ultimate view of these theory on human body is considered impermanent and non-self.

In Mahayana and Vajrayana systems, with the more complexity from cultural and social intercrossing and interacting between Indian, Central Asian and Far East Asian countries where Buddhism has spread, the theories and practices have influences from either Hindi and Daoist philosophies that was already in the background of the lands and peoples adopting and practicing Buddhism. This explains in Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, there is a wider variety of practices with expressions and manifestations with Daoist and Tantric characteristics.

IV.1.2. Practices:

1. Prostration

This type of practice is popular in all Buddhist traditions. Monastic and lay people would bow to the altar while reciting the names of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. People can do this at home and pilgrimage sites. The most popular style is done with knees still bent and the upper body position flat on the floor with hands and forehead touch the ground as a way to show respect to the Buddha. The second style has whole body stretch out flat on the floor as done in Tibetan tradition. In general, this form of practice has effects on the physical and energetic bodies more than the mind as compare to meditation.

The benefits of this practice to activate whole body while the mind focuses on the worshiping object, either the Buddha statue or a visualization of the iconic figures such as Kuan Yin Bodhisattva. For the beginners, there is recommendation of daily 2-to-5-minute breathing and bowing exercise, or 10 bows each session in the morning and/or in the evening. In this bowing exercise, we improve our ability to focus, flexibility of joints /tendons, blood circulation [body and brain], detox [sweat and mind purifying]. This style is common in both Pure Land and Chan or Zen traditions. In Pure Land school, they do prostration before chantting the sutras or reciting the Amita Buddha's name. Also, they chant together some mantras (as influenced by Tantric tradition in Vietnamese Buddhism) - mostly sitting positions, then stand up and prostrate. Sometimes, they combine both prostrating and walking around the prayer wheel while reciting the mantra "*Om Mani Padme Hum*". In meditation practice, practitioners would do prostrations to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha before sitting meditation.

2) The Four Foundations for Mindfulness - Vipassana: practitioners practice contemplating on body, sensations or feelings, mind, and dhammas or mental objects. This method was taught by

the Buddha and written down in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Theravada tradition applies this teaching as meditation technique. In the US, Goenka Vipassana tradition is more popular to Americans since it has been organized into ten-day retreat with specific technique assigned for each practicing day. Mainly, this method uses breathing and focuses on contemplating the body sensation and perception more than Zen style. This tradition emphasizes on the three dharma seals: impermanence, non-self, and truth of suffering. Americans are used to industrialized lifestyle with simple and tangible meditation objects: their body sensations and feelings.

Monks in Theravada have walking for alms round as their form of physical exercise to serve the need of survival and maintaining health of the body in balance with the mind.

3) Meditation of Zen/Chan/Thiền Tổ Sư tradition: also starting with counting breaths at the beginning. In advance level, the practitioner starts contemplating on a *koan,* often given by the Zen master. In general, the practitioners learn about the Buddha's teachings especially focuses on the mind analysis. The eight consciousnesses, the concept of Emptiness and the delusional nature of all phenomena are often the meditation objects for practitioners to contemplate on. The approach is more on managing the mind to calm body, rather than focusing on the body as compared to Vipassana method. They aim for reaching a state of mind called Samatha and samadhi.

In Zen tradition, the meditation technique has influence from Daoist energy guiding. The breathing with focus on *tanden* in *hara* region is similar with concept of dantian, the center of gravity in low abdomen in Neidan practice. That is because when the Buddhist master Bodhidharma brought meditation practice to China in the fifth century CE when Daoism already became the backbone of spiritual and cultural practices among both monastic and lay people of this land. At that time, it was common for monks and court officials to practice Daoist exercise

for health or for combat reasons. In their belief, they absorbed the yin-yang theory and were able to apply in daily life activities. So, when meditating Buddhist way, they utilized what they knew from Daoist training to support their Buddhist lives.

Within this Mahayana tradition, there are a few know forms of physical exercise to balance with the mind practice: *Shaolin kungfu (Võ Thiếu Lâm)* and *Bodhidharma Yijin Jing (Đạt-Ma Dịch Cân Kinh)*. *Shaolin Kungfu* is Shaolin martial art that provides methods for promoting both physical and energetic conditions of the monks, specifically. Lay people also practice this as a form of sport. It shares many principles of Daoist theory, probably due to the Chinese cultural and social influences. As for the Yijin Jing (the moving-tendon exercise for circulating internal energy), since being taught by the Grand Chan Master Bodhidharma who came from India, one can say Shaolin internal energy exercise can be called Chinese yoga.

3) Tantric meditation**:**

Mahamudra and Kālacakra traditions are only two of many tantric practices in Vajrayana traditions. At the beginning level, practitioners can follow instructions form Dharma lessons and practice for the calm mind and relaxed body. But at advance levels, these practices are meant to be secret, only the master and disciple would communicate along the training sessions since there is transmission of the tantra at the right times. Scholarly, there still can be description and explanation on these traditions; but that will only give some mapping tools for the truth seekers.

However, for purpose of opening the energy channels and regulating internal energy for health maintenance, we can apply the Tibetan 9-round breathing. It is the most simple and easiest to apply on daily basis for busy people in industrialized society. This exercise opens up the central, the left, and the right channels in the body. Besides, there are Youtube clip of Dr. Nida's instruction on exercises for moving energetic channels and chakras to enhance and elevate

energetic body for healthier body and mind. The movements do have similar principles with Indian Yogic practice. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4znRESWy0qo&t=1363s

Within Mahamudra tradition, there is a practice called " Ignorance and Sleep Dawning as Wisdom". Because we are most ignorant when we fall asleep, doing this exercise will help us achieve wisdom even in sleeping time. The practitioner will do "vajra recitation", reciting om-ah-hum sounds with his/her heart visualizing the clarity of light. The sequence is: breathing in - OM; with the wind or air inside there is AH; when breathing out, HUM. With this, the person falls asleep. It is a great purification of the sleep and of the ignorance.

IV.2. Daoist Theories and Practices:

The main theory of Daoism is Yin-Yang theory. Dao De Jing (or Tao Te Ching) stresses the ultimate Dao manifests into the two polarities of existence: yin and yang. For its view on human existence, there is phenomenon of the Three Treasures: Jing (Essence) - Qi (Vital energy) - Shen (Spirit). This view introduces the concept of Daoist internal alchemy more for spiritual practice than for earthly desire life. Human body is a mini cosmos; and both have three treasures: Jing (Essence), Qi (Vitality), Shen (Spirit). Internal alchemy practice has stages for transmutation from Jing to Qi, from Qi to Shen, and from Shen merging into the Dao. Among the ingredients for internal alchemy, stillness is the most essential one. The others include wu wei (no activity), one’s jing-qi-shen, one’s life-force, restraint, and meditation.

Daoist meditation is almost like yogis doing yoga. The practitioner's intention is to move the vital energy accordingly to his/her level of practice. This is done in cross-leg lotus position. Mostly these are Daoist monks and nuns who dedicate their lives to achieve the high state of existence with the goal to become immortals called Xian (the heavenly person living on top of the mountain).

On the other side, common people without enthusiasm for immortality often seek for some exercise to maintain health and prevent illnesses. Daoist theory and practice can provide them at least two forms of exercise: Taijiquan (Taichi) and Qigong. Both of these are movements of physical body, controlled by the intentions from the practitioner's mind in guiding internal energy to flow the smooth and natural flow of vitality. Therefore, it is very pleasant to practice these forms. The moves are very graceful, slow, and steady which allow both physical body and internal energy to have time to adjust their status in given time and space. The important principle in taichi and qigong is: the spirit leads intention, intention leads the energy, the energy leads the body. In class, the experienced master would often repeat this reminder to his/her students to make sure they keep in mind for practicing.

For daily life benefit, Daoist philosophy and theory offer guidance for life being harmonious with nature, following the seasons, applying Wu-xing (Five-element theory) in tastes, colors, and sounds to reach balance of within one's body as well as with the environment. Only when the body has balance, the mind can stay calm and the qi can be smooth. People follow this simple yet basic and profound guidance in foods, medicine, family, business and social connections anywhere at any time.

Since Daoist philosophy is simple and free from religious obligation, there are more people from different backgrounds, different age groups, different ethnicities applying it in the US. Especially, people like beauty, happiness, and health, Daoist theory and practice are more friendly to them compared to Buddhist theory and practice. One goes along with the samsara, the other aims to exit it. To exit means to go against the common flow of greed, anger, and ignorance to head for ultimate reality. That is harder task than just to move along with how to keep steady positive values of human body and mind in the conventional reality.

V. CONCLUSION:

Both Buddhist and Daoist theories and practices recognize human existence at not only physical but energetic and spiritual form. The early Buddhism also had training in yogic breathing for the training to the physical body, but focuses more on the mind training. Buddhist ultimate goal is to liberate from the *samsara*-the endless cycles of rebirths. So, the physical and energetic trainings only serve the purpose of keeping the body healthy enough to support the mind trainings to attain the state of Enlightenment, Nirvana. Even with such simple expectation for the physical and energetic body, Buddhism provides a wide variety of practices in different traditions to keep human from sufferings of illnesses and mental instability.

This variety ranking from Theravada to Mahayana and to Vajrayana also known as Tantric Buddhism. Theravada has the popular Vipassana meditation which rooted from the Buddha's teaching in Samyutta Nikaya on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The four are body, sensations/feelings, perceptions/mind, and the mental objects. There are great details of how to practice each step of the process which the Buddha taught in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Majjhima Nikaya 10: *The Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness*).

The other important concepts or theories in Buddhism include the Five aggregates, the Twelve Dependence Originations along with impermanence, non-self, and the suffering nature of life. The Buddha listed sufferings as the fact of life, but he also pointed out the cause for those sufferings. With his Perfect Wisdom, he found out the path leading to end the cause of suffering, which is a triumph for his long search. Buddhist practices in three main traditions can provide methods to reduce or end suffering to physical and energetic body and further more to clear suffering of the mind. There are: prostration, chanting, Zen meditation, and tantric practices as a wide spectrum of health maintenance being offered to people of modern time.

The early Daoism has more details in training the Jing (essence in physical body) so that it can facilitate for the energy transforming into higher stage of existence. Beside Daoist internal alchemy practice for reaching immortality, there are other practices just for maintaining health physical and energetic bodies. They are Taijiquan and Qigong exercises. These techniques supplements for the Buddhist practitioners, especially the monastic members, to successfully manage their energy at both bodily and heart-mind levels for further advancement on the Path to Enlightenment.

There is some connection between Daoist and Medieval Indian theory and practices on using this very human body to cultivate spiritual capabilities. Both view human body as a microcosmos and have the ultimate goal of practices to emerge with the original state of being, the Dao, the Atman. While the historical Sakya Buddha came from Indian land, his teachings and practices certainly have some influences from this ancient yogic tradition. Because of this link, Daoist practices and Buddhist practices do share some common ground in body and mind methods. They both use breaths as the means to regulate physical and energetic bodies in the first stage. Then, these breathing methods can lead to calming and purifying the mind for higher state of existence.

Neuroscience researches have shown how both Buddhist meditators and Taichi Qigong practitioners can improve structures and functions of the brain such as increase grey matters for better memory and neuroplasticity for mental health.

The weakness of this paper is that the topic covers the such a large topic from the two ancient religions, especially in Buddhism, with broad area of study with theories and wide variety of practices. Therefore, the writer did not have enough time to carefully read through materials

with deep contemplation. Tantric theory and practices are quite complex. Without real training in this tradition, there is only theory to cognize, but not the fruit from those practices.

The strength of this paper is that it focuses on the practical exercises for health promoting and explaining the theories behind them. Most of the time, people often think ancient wisdoms are complex and difficult to understand and unsuitable for daily application in modern society. Hopefully with this study, both monastic and lay people regardless of their faith find motivation to practice one or more energy exercises in their daily routine for better physical and mental health.

Future recommendation:

Children should be taught in elementary classes about the energetic body, the vajra body. Only then, the system can equip kids with knowledge, awareness, and skills to regulate their own bodies, physically and energetically. This enhances wisdom, skills and compassion throughout their lives span. There should be more trainings on these energetic exercises than just a handful of scholars and practitioners of these traditions in society.

Since children have shorter attention span than adults, the school can develop a gradually increasing meditation time. For example, from kindergarten or first grade, children are instructed by their teacher to practice observing their breaths for three to five minutes before class starts and equivalent time after class. There is gradual increase in time as the students get older. The breathing exercise in elementary school will develop into more like a breathing meditation in high school program. The simplest energetic body breathing exercise probably is the Tibetan nine-round breathing with just three channels, which can be taught in elementary school. Then in junior high and high school, the first four of the sixteen breathing exercises

which guiding the students contemplate on their own breaths in early stage and later on the sensations from physical body. This group of breathing contemplation belongs to the first of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness practice. Finally, in college level and above, the rest of the sixteen breathing exercises can be instructed to those who wish to advance their meditation practice.

To assist their visualization, there should be charts of the energetic chakras and channels hanging in the classroom or printed in their books along with regular anatomy charts. The more they see, the more they can visualize and be aware of their own chakras and energetic channels.

Currently, acupuncture channels and points have been more popularized through acupuncture schools and clinics. The yogic chakras charts are getting more popularized among yoga studios and practitioners. In a way, the movement of introducing the concept of energetic body and methods of practice has been in motion in the past decade. The next wave to push this awareness into the US school system.

Going back to finance matter: it saves money for individual, family, and society. Take example, my Taichi masters, they only went to see doctors for yearly checkup into their 80s years of age, no illness until mid-90s years of age. Their colleagues spent much more time and effort to stay healthy with the conventional life style and health management. Once the body has stagnation and imbalances, it is more costly to Medicare system, to family members, not counting mental sufferings of worry, anxiety, and disappointment at the treatment results….

Moreover, this paper suggests many options for future studies into each of these practices at a deeper level of analysis and contemplation. Hopefully with advance technology, researchers

can detect and measure human vital energy more easily. With that vision, researchers can link concepts of health with more focus on *energetic body* for their hypotheses.

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